

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

NUMBER: INTL 4676
TITLE: Soccer & Politics

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Cas Mudde (mudde@uga.edu)
OFFICE: IA Building 324
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

TERM: Spring 2026
DATE & TIME: Tu-Th, 2:55-4:15
ROOM: Journalism 509

Introduction:

Soccer, or football as it is commonly called outside of the United States, is the only truly global sports. It has an estimated 4 billion supporters, which means that about half of the world population is a soccer fan! Moreover, unlike the second-most popular sport in the world, cricket, soccer is the most popular sport in the vast majority of countries around the world. Even in the US, where it still lags the “Big Four” (football, baseball, basketball, hockey) in terms of revenue, soccer is the most-played sports by both girls *and* boys.

It is popular to argue that politics should be kept out of sports, but the reality is that politics and sports have always been connected. Given the central place of soccer in societies around the world, it should come as no surprise that politics and soccer are closely connected too. Politics influences and reflects the context in which soccer operates but soccer can also affect politics. Hence, many politicians try to use soccer for their own political gain – from buying soccer teams to flaunting their (alleged) support for them.

In this course, we will look at the intersection between soccer and politics from a global perspective. We will look at the politics *in* and *of* the sport, its clubs, and its fans. But we will also use soccer as a lens to look at important aspect of politics, such as activism, gender, nationalism, sexuality, and war. Because, as the famous Liverpool FC coach Bill Shankly used to say, “football is not a matter of life and death. It is much more important than that.”

Readings:

We will use only one book in this course, which is non-fiction literature rather than an academic text. Although there are many versions of the book, which seem largely the same, I recommend that you buy:

Simon Kuper, *Soccer against the Enemy: How the World's Most Popular Sport Starts and Fuels Revolutions and Keeps Dictators in Power*. New York: Bold Type Books, 2020, 3rd edition (SATE).

In addition to this book, various other readings will be assigned to specific classes. These texts will be made available on ELC, well ahead of the relevant class.

I will also use a few episodes of my own (now dormant) podcast [RADIKAL](#), which focuses on the radical aspects of music, politics, and sports, and is available for free on almost all podcast platforms.

Course objectives:

- ✪ To introduce student to the key intersections between soccer and politics, such as the use of soccer by politics and the political aspects of soccer.
- ✪ To show that politics is all around us and should not be reduced to key institutions (e.g. parties, parliaments).
- ✪ To better understand key concepts of politics (such as gender and nationalism).
- ✪ To gain a more comprehensive understanding of politics.

Teaching Methodology:

- ✪ Class discussions
- ✪ Documentaries and movies
- ✪ Guest lectures

Course Evaluation:

- ✪ Class participation (10%)
- ✪ Midterm Exam (30%)
- ✪ Group Video (20%)
- ✪ Club report (20%)
- ✪ Final Exam (20%)

Class participation (10%): this includes the *preparation*, i.e. the reading of and the reflecting on the compulsory readings for each class, *and participation* in discussion in the classroom and/or online on the ELC course page. You are expected to regularly participate in the class (group) discussions in an active, civil, positive, and well-informed manner.

Midterm Exam (30%): the in-class midterm exam will test your knowledge of the material that has been covered in the course up to the date of the exam (**September 30**). The midterm exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions.

Group Project (20%): you will make a group video on the political activities of soccer fans in one specific country or region – schedule to be announced in the third week of the course. The video should be no longer than **15 minutes** and be **well-produced and well-**

researched. You are expected to draw upon both the compulsory reading of the course (for context and comparison) and various additional academic sources on the politics of soccer fans (within the country) as well as on the political context of that country. Note that this is one of your big assignments and I expect you to take it as serious as your midterm or final exam. Part of your group video grade *could* come from peer evaluation.

I want you to start working on the video project early in the semester. On **February 3**, we will have no class, and you are expected to meet with your group members to discuss a detailed outline of the video, which is due on **February 10**. It should lay out, in some detail, the key points of the video, include links to the specific clips that will feature in the video, and list the academic and non-academic sources used for the video. The **pre-final video** is due for review (by me) by **February 20** and the final version should be uploaded by **March 3** at the latest – by which time you should also email me a list of the academic and non-academic sources you have used (all deadlines are 11:59 PM EST).

Club report (20%): you will write a short report (1,000-1,500 words) on the question: is club X a “political club”? I will assign you a specific club (X) by the third week of class. A specific document with more detailed information about this assignment will be uploaded to the Elc course page. The deadline is **April 7, 11:59 PM EST**.

Final Exam (20%)

You will have an in-class final exam that will assess your knowledge of all the material discussed since the Midterm. The exam will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions. Date: **May 5, 3:30 PM**.

Grading:

| Letter Grade | Points |
|--------------|-----------------|
| A | 93 – 100 points |
| A- | 90 – 92 points |
| B+ | 87 – 89 points |
| B | 83 – 86 points |
| B- | 80 – 82 points |
| C+ | 77 – 79 points |
| C | 73 – 76 points |
| C- | 70 – 72 points |
| D+ | 67 – 69 points |
| D | 63 – 66 points |
| D- | 60 – 62 points |

| | |
|---|--------------|
| F | 59 and below |
|---|--------------|

Classroom Attendance and Activity

Classroom attendance is not mandatory. **However**, there are various reasons why (regular) attendance is highly recommended. First, and foremost, students learn much more when they come to class and participate in the class discussions. Second, participation is an important part of your final grade and will be based *primarily* on your in-class performance (see above). Third, it is always easier to learn together than alone.

Some Specific Course Ground Rules

1. Office Hours

I hold office hours every week, for two hours. I reserve this time exclusively to be available for my students. I strongly encourage you to come to office hours, ideally early in the semester, so that we get to know each other better. Experience has taught me that students who come to office hours, even once, feel more comfortable to reach out to me if they need help and do better in class. Know that you do not need to have a “problem” to come to office hours and that I am happy to not just discuss the course but also other academic issues. You can sign-up for my office hours, which are **Tuesdays between 9 and 11 AM**, on the Elc course page. If you cannot meet in person because you have classes, send me an email and we’ll meet (in person or online) at another time!

2. Incompletes

It is not my practice to give incompletes. **Only** if there is a suitable reason – subject to my approval and supported by appropriate written documentation – an exception may be possible. *If you are struggling with completing assigned work, please let me know as soon as you can, so that we can work out a solution.*

3. Laptops, Tablets, Phones, etc.

[Research](#) has shown that electronic devices distract students and negatively impact their learning. Importantly, it does not only distract the student with the device but also those around them! Hence, laptops, tablets, phones, etc. are not allowed in the classroom! Be ready with pen and paper to make notes in class. If you use any of these banned devices in class, you may be asked to leave the classroom. If it happens multiple times, you will be punished with a deduction of **10 points** of your *final grade*!

4. Discussion Form and Content

I do not expect that your views on and perceptions of the (sometimes controversial) themes discussed in class are identical with those of your classmates, or me, either now or at the completion of the course. This course is a place for the free exchange of ideas. But, this should always be informed and respectful! Thus, I expect you to *challenge viewpoints* that differ from your own, but also to *substantiate your arguments* on the basis of the readings, lectures and discussions. And, please separate the academic from the personal.

5. Reference Works

If you need to use outside reference works, please consult Joel Krieger (et al.), [*Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) as a place to start for political terms or concepts. Do not use Webster or other dictionaries for political science definitions. For outside research sources, please use Galileo.

Please do **not** use the notoriously unreliable **Wikipedia**. If you do choose to use dictionaries, encyclopedias, or Wikipedia, you indicate to me that you did not read the syllabus and will lose points on your assignment.

6. Grades

Obviously, I take the grading of assignments serious and devote a lot of time and effort to this task. Should you nevertheless believe that you deserve a different grade, please provide a **written explanation** to me *within two weeks* of receiving the grade. I will then re-grade your *whole* exam/paper and issue a “new” grade. Note that this grade can be the same, higher, or lower!

7. Emails

Please use proper etiquette when emailing me (see ELC course page). Emails with questions that can be answered by reading the syllabus will not be answered. Remember, I am a human being, who has a personal life, and works **Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM EST** (excluding holidays). Hence, I will respond to your emails during these times, irrespective when *you* send your email!

Names and Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I am eager to address you by your *preferred* name and/or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Academic Honesty

UGA Student Honor Code: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at honesty.uga.edu.

Disclaimer

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

UGA Well-being Resources

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community.

Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit sco.uga.edu. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services.

They also administer the Embark@UGA program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity.

UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Accessibility & Testing: accessibility.uga.edu
- Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention: 706-542-SAFE
(Please note, faculty and staff are obligated to report any knowledge of sexual assault/relationship violence to UGA's Equal Opportunity Office. The advocates at RSVP can provide student confidentially).

Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting well-being.uga.edu.

ChatGPT

Although I am highly skeptical of the use of AI tools, for intellectual and [environmental](#) (!) reasons, I do not ban its use. You can use AI to develop ideas, get started on a project, improve your language and writing. But you are fully responsible for any AI-generated materials that you incorporate in your course assignments. *If* you include AI-generated materials in your course assignments, you *must* cite them like any other reference material. All information incorporated into course assignments must be verified, ideas must still be attributed, and facts must be true.

You may NOT prompt AI to write your assignment! If you do submit an AI-generated assignment, you will not only FAIL the course but you will also be held in breach of the UGA Student Honor Code.

Visual or Audio Recording

In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability, students may **not** make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course.

Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

Disability Statement

UGA is committed to the success of all learners, and we strive to create an inclusive and accessible online environment. In collaboration with the [Disability Resource Center](#), we work with students who have documented disabilities to access reasonable accommodations and academic supports. For more information or to speak with a Disability coordinator, please call the Disability Resource Center at (706) 542-8719, TTY only phone (706) 542-8778.

Third-Party Software and FERPA:

During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these are required assignments, you need **not** make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identifiable/sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Important Dates:

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| February, 3 | NO CLASS (Meet with Project Group) |
| February, 10 | Deadline Draft Group Project |

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| February, 20 | Deadline Pre-Final Video |
| February, 26 | MIDTERM EXAM (in class) |
| March, 3 | Deadline Final Video |
| March, 10-12 | SPRING BREAK (no class) |
| March, 24 | GT-UGA Lecture Series (Different Room!) |
| April, 7 | Deadline Club Report |
| April, 21 | Watch Party (at 7:00 PM!) |
| May, 5 | FINAL EXAM, 3:30 PM (in class) |

THEMATIC OUTLINE

1 – Introduction (1/13)

In this introductory class, we will discuss the intentions and outline of the course as well as our mutual expectations. We will also assess your knowledge of soccer, your favorite clubs, and the way you see the relationship between soccer and politics.

Listening:

Simon Kuper (RADIKAL #51)

PART I – THEORIES & PERSPECTIVES

2 – Sports and Politics (1/15)

Politicians and sports officials love to proclaim that “sports and politics should be separated”, although few are truly consistent in making this argument. The real question is not whether sports and politics should be separated but whether they can be separated.

Reading:

Grix, Jonathan and Mark James (2024) “The Politicization of Sport and the Principle of Political Neutrality: A Contradiction in Terms?”, *The International Sports Law Journal*, 24, 68-77.

3 – Soccer as Civil Society (1/20)

Sports organizations are a foundational structure of the social life of many people around the world. As such, they form a key part of what is called “civil society”, even if this rarely acknowledged. What does the idea of “soccer as civil society” mean and how is it threatened by “modern football”?

Reading:

Mudde, Cas (2025) “Soccer as Civil Society”, in Kirk Bowman and John B. Boyd (eds.), *Soccer, Globalization, and Innovation: The Beautiful Game in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 23-37.

4 – Three Discourses on Soccer (1/22)

No one doubts that soccer is important to society, but people do disagree on what its exact role in society is. The different discourses about the role of soccer in society also influence the way in which the relationship between soccer and politics is seen.

Reading:

Bar-On, Tamir (2017) “Three Soccer Discourses”, *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 188-203.

5 – Globalization (1/27)

For decades the world has become more connected in terms of culture, economics, politics, and, of course, sports. This process of “globalization” obviously also affects the most popular sport on the globe, soccer, but how?

Class discussion: What, if anything, can soccer tell us about globalization?

Readings:

Croci, Osvaldo and Julian Ammirante (1999) “Soccer in the Age of Globalization”, *Peace Review*, 11(4), 499-504.

Kuper, Simon (2010) “Soccer Explains Nothing”, *Foreign Policy*, 21 July.

Waalkes, Scott (2017) “Does Soccer Explain the World or Does the World Explain Soccer? Soccer and Globalization”, *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 166-180.

PART II – SOCCER AGAINST THE ENEMY (SATE)

In the next classes we will read Simon Kuper’s “Soccer against the Enemy” (SATE) to start developing ideas on how soccer and politics can and do interact across the world. While the readings per class are more than usual, this is a non-academic text that reads very easy and fast.

6 – Soccer against the Enemy I (1/29)

Readings:

SATE, chapter 1-6.

7 – Group Project Meeting (2/3)

For this class, you will meet with the other members of your research group and discuss the progress you have achieved so far. You do not have to meet on the exact date or time of the class, and you can meet anywhere you want, but the classroom is available for you and your group at the regular class time.

Readings:

SATE, chapter 7-12.

8 – Doing Library Research (2/5)

Elizabeth White (elizabethwhite@uga.edu) will come to class to introduce you to the best ways that you can to make optimal use of the excellent offline and online library resources of UGA.

Readings:

SATE, chapter 13-15.

9 – Soccer against the Enemy (2/10)

In this class, we will discuss the main issues of “Soccer against the Enemy”. Every student is encouraged to come prepared with three main takeaways of the book, which we can discuss in class.

Readings:

SATE, chapter 16-20.

PART III – SOCCER & IDENTITY

10 – Gender & Sexuality (2/12)

In most of the world, soccer is and always has been seen as a sport for “real men” – relating to specific expectations of gender and sexuality. This is particularly the case for professional soccer. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln’s most famous line from the Gettysburg Address, soccer is a sport of men, by men, and for men. But is it? And how do gender and sexuality relate to soccer?

Class discussion: Is soccer still a “men’s sport”?

Reading:

Caudwell, Jayne (2011) “Gender, Feminism, and Football Studies”, *Soccer & Society*, 12(3), 330-344.

Skogvang, Bente Ovedie and Kari Fasting (2013) “Football and Sexualities in Norway”, *Soccer & Society*, 14(6), 872-886.

Further Reading & Viewing:

Offside (IR, 2006), 1h 33m.

Eskandari, Zahra Termesh (2022) “We Support Football in Our Heart:’ Female Football Fandom in Iran”, *Soccer & Society*, 23(3), 258-270.

Magrath, Rory (2021) “Gay Male Football Fans’ Experiences: Authenticity, Belonging and Conditional Acceptance”, *Sociology*, 55(5), 978-994.

11 – Women Soccer (2/17)

Most of the time, when people talk about soccer, they really mean “men soccer”. Even in the US, one of the few countries where women soccer outshines men soccer, it is much more common to speak of “women soccer” than of “men soccer”. How has women soccer developed and what are its (continuing) challenges?

Reading:

Cox, Barbara and Shona Thompson (2003) “From Heydays to Struggles: Women’s Soccer in New Zealand”, *Soccer & Society*, 4(2-3), 205-224.

Valenti, Maurizio, Qi Peng and Claudio Rocha (2021) “Integration Between Women’s and Men’s Football Clubs: A Comparison Between Brazil, China and Italy”, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(2), 321-339.

Suggested Listening:

Tessel Middag (RADIKAAAL #73)

12 – Race and (Anti-)Racism (2/19)

In the 1960s, one of the most famous soccer players in lily-white Europe was the Portuguese striker Eusébio. The “Black Pearl” was just the first of a long line of non-white players who would become soccer stars in majority-white countries. But this does not mean that racism is not a major problem in soccer.

Class task: Develop an effective anti-racism assignment for Atlanta United.

Reading:

Kassimeris, Christos, Stefan Lawrence and Magdalini Pipini (2022) “Racism in Football”, *Soccer & Society*, 23(8), 824-833.

Moran, Richie (2000) “Racism in Football: A Victim’s Perspective”, *Soccer & Society*, 1(1), 190-200.

Horvath, Kenneth and Jakob Rosenberg (2010) “EUROSCHOOLS 2008: The Difficult Relationship of Culture, Nation and Anti-Racism in UEFA’s Campaign Work”, *Soccer & Society*, 11(6), 829-842.

13 – Nationalism and National Identity (2/24)

Given the importance of soccer and the organization of tournaments based on “nationality” (or better: statehood), like the World Cup, it should come as no surprise that nationalism and soccer are closely connected. But the relationship does not only play out in national teams. Some club teams also have strong “national” connotations.

Class discussion: How are soccer and national identity related in the U.S.?

Readings:

Duerr, Glenn M.E. (2017) “Civic Integration and Ethnic Segregation? Models of Ethnic and Civic Nationalism in Club Football/Soccer”, *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 204-217.

Metzger, Stefan and Özgür Özvatan (2021) “Games of Belonging: Football, Boundaries and Politics between Germany and Turkey”, *Nationalities Papers*, 48(4), 737-751.

Further Reading:

Krasnoff, Lindsay Sarah (2017) “Devolution of *Les Bleus* as a Symbol of a Multicultural French History”, *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 311-319.

14 – MIDTERM EXAM (2/26)

PART IV – THE FANS

15 – The Fans (3/3)

People follow (professional) soccer in different ways. In fact, many individual “soccer fans” follow soccer in very complex ways, depending on the club or league, as well as their stage in life. So-called “modern soccer” has profoundly transformed the sport, commodifying and globalizing it at unprecedented levels, and this has also changed the way in which soccer is followed.

Class discussion: Which type of “fan” is most important for (modern) soccer?

Reading:

Giulianotti, Richard (2002) “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football”, *Journal of Sports & Social Issues*, 26(1), 25-46.

Optional Reading:

Osborne, Anne C. and Danielle Sarver Coombs (2013) “Performative Sport Fandom: An Approach to Rethorizing Sport Fans”, *Sport in Society*, 16(5), 672-681.

16 – Hooligans (3/5)

Although violence has always been part of soccer, it only became a key element of the public image of soccer in the late 1970s, when so-called “hooligans” became the obsession of (tabloid) media and (right-wing) politicians. What are “hooligans” and what is their relationship to soccer and to violence?

Class discussion: How can soccer solve its “hooligan problem”?

Reading:

Spaaij, Ramón (2008) “Men Like Us, Boys Like Them: Violence, Masculinity, and Collective Identity in Football Hooliganism”, *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 32(2), 369-392.

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK (3/10 & 3/12)

17 – Ultras (3/17)

As “hooligans” became a (sensationalized) phenomenon in England, a somewhat similar, but also different, soccer subculture emerged in Italy: the ultras. Today, while hooligans have become much less visible in stadiums, ultras set the stage in stadiums

across the world, from the top divisions to the lower leagues. What are ultras? And what is their relationship to politics?

In Class: COPA90, "[And We Tell You: The Origins of Italian Ultras](#)", 2021, 43:27 min.

Listening:

James Montague (RADIKAAAL #1)

PART V – WHO CONTROLS SOCCER?

18 – The State (3/19)

All states control sports in some way, but many authoritarian regimes have a particularly strong interest in sports for ideological or political reasons. This applied to the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century but also to contemporary authoritarian leaders and regimes. Some leaders, like Erdogan in Turkey and Orbán in Hungary, have shown a particular interest in soccer, making the sport an important space for politics.

Class discussion: Can the state ever truly control soccer?

Readings:

Dennis, Mike and Jonathan Grix (2010) "Behind the Iron Curtain: Football as a Site of Contestation in the East German Sports 'Miracle'", *Sports in History*, 30(3), 447-474.
Irak, Daghan (2020) "Football in Turkey during the Erdogan Regime", *Soccer & Society*, 21(6), 680-691.

Suggested Viewing:

Istanbul United (TR, 2014), 1h 25m

19 – GT-UGA Lecture Series on Soccer & Politics (3/24)

Today's class will be the third GT-UGA Lecture Series on Soccer and Politics, which will be held during class time, but in a different room (TBD).

Reading:

TBD

20 – The Fans (3/26)

With soccer getting increasingly commodified, globalized, and regulated, what role is there still for the fans? How much power do fans hold? And which fans hold what power?

Watch In Class: [Who Owns Football?](#) (NL, 2014), 49 min.

Class discussion: What should the power of fans be?

Readings:

Schmidt, Siemen and Joerg Koenigstorfer (2022) “Fan Centricity of German Soccer Teams: Exploring the Construct and Its Consequences, *Soccer & Society*, 23(1), 89-103.

Brown, Adam (2007) “‘Not for Sale’? The Destruction and Reformation of Football Communities in the Glazer Takeover of Manchester United”, *Soccer & Society*, 8(4), 614-635.

21 – Professional Associations (3/31)

Not only states govern soccer, so do professional associations at the national and supernational levels. The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) govern soccer at the global and European level, respectively, and are both powerful and protective of their power. So, what happens when they face off with states or supernational organizations?

Class discussion: Who is more powerful in soccer, professional associations or states?

Reading:

Meier, Henk Erik, Boria Garcia, Serhat Yilmaz and Webster Chakawata (2023) “The Capture of EU Football Regulation by the Football Governing Bodies”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 61(3), 692-711.

22 – Capitalism (4/02)

Soccer has always been closely related to capitalism and professional soccer even more. This is why many left-wing intellectuals were initially very critical of soccer. But in the last decades, money has become increasingly dominant in soccer, making some people argue that money rules “modern soccer”.

Class discussion: What role should money play in soccer?

Readings:

Eagleton, Tom (2010) “Football: A Dear Friend to Capitalism”, [*The Guardian*](#), 15 June.

Welsh, John (2023) “The European Soccer League Debacle: Why Regulation of Corporate Football Is Essential”, *Soccer & Society*, 24(2), 172-189.

Listening:

BBC (2024) [*Teams and Regimes: Sportswashing in Football*](#), 38 min. (radio)

PART V – SPORTS DIPLOMACY

23 – Soccer Diplomacy (4/07)

Given its international character and popularity, it makes sense that sports in general, and soccer in particular, can be used by states as a form of “diplomacy”. This is particularly the case for big international events, like the men soccer World Cups.

Class discussion: Is soccer an effective tool for diplomacy? What are the strengths and weaknesses of “soccer diplomacy”?

Readings:

Brannagan, Paul Michael and Richard Giulianotti (2017) “Soft Power and Soft Disempowerment: Qatar, Global Sport and Football’s 2022 World Cup Finals”, *Leisure Studies*, 34(6), 703-719.

Ndlovu, Sifiso Mxolisi (2010) “Sports as Cultural Diplomacy: The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa’s Foreign Policy”, *Soccer & Society*, 11(1-2), 144-153.

24 – The 2022 Qatar World Cup (4/09)

As soon as the 2022 Men World Cup was awarded to the small but extremely wealthy Arab Gulf state Qatar, it was surrounded by controversy and speculation. It also triggered discussions about the relationship between soccer and politics across the globe.

Class discussion: What did the 2022 Qatar Men World Cup teach us about “sportswashing”?

Reading:

Ganji, Sarath K. (2022) “How Qatar Became a World Leader in Sportswashing”, *Journal of Democracy*, November.

Listening:

CBC (2022) “[How the World Cup in Qatar Is Kicking Off a Conversation about ‘Sportswashing’](#)”, 20 November.

25 – The 2026 North American World Cup (4/14)

Although the bid for the 2026 North American World Cup predates the political career of Donald Trump, he enthusiastically supported the bid during his first term and has played a prominent role in the preparations of the event in his second term. The open bromance between Trump and FIFA President Gianni Infantino has led to a new FIFA Peace Prize, awarded to Trump, and even a court case against the alleged politicization of FIFA by Infantino.

Class discussion: Will the 2026 North American World Cup be the MAGA World Cup?

Reading:

Beissel, Adam S. and David L. Andrews (2021) “Art of the Deal: Donald Trump, the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and the Geopolitics of Football Aspiration”, in Alan

Tomlinson and Bryan Clift (eds), *Populism in Sport, Leisure, and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 234-253.

Listening:

BBC Americast (2025) "[Is Trump Giving the FIFA World Cup a MAGA Makeover?](#)", 5 December.

26 – Soccer in the US: Still “American Exceptionalism”? (4/16)

After several failed attempts, professional soccer has finally established itself in the U.S. in the form of Major League Soccer (MLS) – and, at a more modest level, the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL). Although it is still common to hear that soccer is a minor(it) sport in the country, or even that it is “un-American”, the issue of “American exceptionalism” is getting increasingly complex.

Class discussion: Is the U.S. still exceptional in terms of soccer?

Readings:

Reese, Derek (2022), “US Soccer History: 150 Years and Counting”, [World Soccer Talk](#), 28 November.

Markovits, Andrei S. and Steven L. Hellerman (2003) “Women’s Soccer in the United States: Yet Another American ‘Exceptionalism’”, *Soccer & Society*, 4(2-3), 14-29

Collet, Christian (2017) “Soccer, Politics, and the American Public: Still ‘Exceptional’?”, *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 348-367.

27 – WATCH PARTY – AT 7 PM IN TBD! (4/21)

For many decades, the South American country of Colombia was ripped apart by two, interrelated phenomena: civil war and drugs. Between drug dealers, Marxist guerrillas, the official military, and right-wing paramilitary, the Colombia population was caught in an orgy of violence. Every aspect of society was affected, including soccer. We will watch a documentary about soccer in Colombia, which ties the lives of the famous soccer player Andres Escobar and the infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar.

Movie: *The Two Escobars* (COL, 2010), 1h 43m

Reading:

Sabbagh Fajarda, Alfredo and Toby Miller (2017) “The Absence and Presence of State Militarism: Violence, Football, *Narcos*, and Colombia”, in Michael L. Butterworth (ed.), *Sport and Militarism: Contemporary Global Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 95-111.